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2005 Reading by Gillian Dooley.

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This year the best Australian books have been passionate and disturbing. Christos Tsiolkas's novel *Dead Europe* (Random House) is a horrifying tour of the underside of modern Europe: compulsive reading, if sometimes stomach-churning. Eva Sallis's *The Marsh Birds* (Allen & Unwin) gives us the subjective and at times appalling experiences of an Iraqi teenager who is unlucky enough to have escaped Saddam and become an asylum-seeker in Australia. If you're looking for worthwhile reading over the holidays, you could do worse than get hold of all Eva's books, strong and wonderful books with much to say about the nexus between Australian society and the world of the Middle East. And JM Coetzee's *Slow Man* (Random House) a major work of world literature, is set right here in Adelaide, giving us even more reason to believe we might be able to claim the great man as our own.

On the non-fiction side, there are some fine examples of investigative journalism, like *Following Them Home: The Fate of Returned Asylum Seekers* by David Collett (Black Inc.), a sobering corrective to the rhetoric of the Minister for Immigration. Ruth Balint's *Troubled Waters* (Allen & Unwin) exposes the lengths Australia goes to to 'protect' us from the depredations of subsistence fishermen from one of the poorest regions of Indonesia. *Affluenza* by Clive Hamilton and Richard Dennis (Allen & Unwin) takes a swipe at the materialistic values of Australian society. It's entertaining but will probably be read only by those who need its message least.

History enthusiasts might enjoy Peter Corris' novel *The Journal of Fletcher Christian* (Random House), an imaginative tale woven around the historical facts. Miriam Estensen's *Life of George Bass* (Allen & Unwin) provides a well-written account of this charismatic adventurer. Looking further back, you might like to *Meet the Philosophers of Ancient Greece* (Ashgate) in Patricia O'Grady's compilation of bite-size essays on these often enigmatic but undoubtedly influential (mostly) chaps.

Social satire has crept into several novels this year, like Joanna Murray-Smith's *Sunnyside* (Penguin Viking) – a fictional version of *Affluenza*; Andiee Paviour's savage *Deep Waters* (Penguin); and Peter Rose's sensational family saga *A Case of Knives* (Allen & Unwin). More gentle in their approach are three other worthwhile novels: Andrea Mayes' *The Rose Notes* (Penguin), a likeable family drama set in prosperous rural NSW; NA Bourke's *The True Green of Hope* (UQP), an engaging and pensive novel about love and childhood deprivation in Surfers Paradise; and Brenda Walker's touching *The Wing of Night* (Penguin Viking), exploring the aftermath of WWI on individual lives in WA.